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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 001356

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TAGS: ASEC PINR ML

SUBJECT: POLICE IN GAO FOIL ALLEGED ASSASSINATION PLOT

REF: BAMAKO 01175

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: On November 8 security forces in the northern city of Gao disrupted an alleged plot to assassinate the Governor of Gao, the Algerian Consul resident in Gao, the town's public prosecutor and the director of a Malian government development program. Police arrested seven individuals who allegedly belong to the former Patriotic Gandakoy Movement, which was a largely Songhrai militia group responsible for killing Tuaregs and others during the rebellion of the 1990s. Reports indicate that the accused may have been angered by the Malian government's decision to negotiate with the Tuareg bandit Ibrahim Bahanga. End Summary.

Plot Details

2.(C) Police arrested seven individuals in Gao on November 8 for allegedly plotting to assassinate the Governor of Gao, the city's public prosecutor and the director of a Malian government program to reintegrate ex-rebel combatants into local society. Police reportedly seized six hand grenades, three automatic pistols, some ammunition and canisters of a substance described as "knock-out" gas. The arrested individuals are Seydou Cisse, Mohamed N'Tissa Maiga, Bouba Hangadoumbou Toure, Aliou Moussa, Mohamed Djougou, Soumeila Seydou and Sidiya Mahamane. They are all ethnic Songhrai. Malian officials claim the seven belong to the former Patriotic Gandakoy Movement, or MPGK, a largely Songhrai self-defense militia that clashed with Tuareg rebels and others during the rebellion of the 1990s. Rumors of the Gandakoy's reconstitution circulate periodically in Mali. Former Gandakoy members or other individuals seeking to revitalize the Gandakoy movement may be reacting to the Malian government's decision to negotiate with the Tuareg bandit Ibrahim Bahanga, who has held several dozen Malian soldiers hostage for the past three months.

Plot Motives

3.(C) Motives for the assassination plot, if indeed such a plot existed, remain obscure. Mohamed ag Akiline, the Director of the Malian Agency for Northern Development (ADN), linked the plot to Songhrai dissatisfaction over the Malian government's decision to negotiate with Bahanga and other Tuaregs. Ag Akiline is an ethnic Tuareg whose name figured on the list of assassination targets. He said he may have been targeted due to disagreement over ADN's distribution of funds designed to help former rebel combatants reintegrate

into Malian society.

4.(C) Governor (and Army Colonel) Ahmed Baba Toure is regarded as a close confidant of President Amadou Toumani Toure and recently traveled, along with the Governors of Kidal and Timbuktu and the Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone, to Algiers for further consultations on the Bahanga crisis. Like President Toure, Governor Toure is believed to favor a peaceful, negotiated settlement with Bahanga over a military solution.

5.(C) There are conflicting reports as to whether the plotters intended to assassinate or kidnap the Algerian Consul in Gao, Mohamed Bachir Babaci. The Algerian Consulate is located in the Quartier Quatre neighborhood of Gao. Babaci said Malian authorities told him he was the target of an assassination plot. According to Ag Akiline, the plotters intended to kidnap representatives of "countries friendly" with Mali in order to negotiate directly with the Malian government - a move apparently intended to mimic the strategy of Bahanga. Babaci may have been targeted as a response to Algeria's ambiguous role in resolving the Bahanga hostage crisis and apparent support for Bahanga and other Tuareg rebels (reftel).

6.(U) On November 15 the Bamako based newspaper "L'Independent" published the text of a communique, purportedly from Gandakoy leaders in Bamako, stating that while the Gandakoy awaited further clarification from Malian authorities regarding the supposed assassination plot, its leaders "say no to government authorities' lenient treatment of the so-called Tuareg rebellion."

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Comment: Northern Mali's Forgotten Non-Tuareg Population

7.(C) Comment: While many Malians disagree with their government's decision to negotiate with Bahanga - a man who in addition to being a chronic military deserter is responsible for several military and civilian deaths and the introduction of land mines in northern Mali - most realize that a comprehensive military solution is beyond the means of the Malian military. Although details of the Gao plot remain sparse, the incident may point to the broader risk of negotiating with bandits like Bahanga and "rewarding" violence with peace agreements, non-aggression pacts and increased development aid. It also highlights the risk of focusing solely on the development and political demands of northern Mali's ethnic Tuaregs at the expense of non-Tuareg groups like the Songhrai. Other groups, whether Songhrai in northern Mali or different ethnic groups from elsewhere, have taken note of the Tuaregs' success in wringing concessions from the central government and may consider violent acts of their own.

McCulley